

News from the Wyoming Department of Health

Wednesday, November 18, 2009

Unusual Flu Season Continues, More Wyoming Deaths Reported

While swine (novel H1N1) flu activity is decreasing across the state, Wyoming's unusual flu season is continuing as influenza was associated with the recently reported deaths of two more state residents.

An adult male from Natrona County with underlying health conditions associated with higher risk of severe illness died in late October. An adult male from Park County without identified high-risk underlying health conditions died last week. Neither case was confirmed by lab testing as specifically linked to swine (novel H1N1) flu, but both were recorded as flu-related deaths.

These are the ninth and tenth flu-related deaths reported to the department since the emergence of H1N1 flu in Wyoming.

“Due to the H1N1 flu, we have had very widespread flu activity and an unusual flu season so far over the last few months,” said Dr. Tracy Murphy, state epidemiologist with the Wyoming Department of Health. “Our reports from the last few weeks show a marked decrease in cases, but that does not mean this flu season is over. People still need to take precautions against the flu, including pursuing vaccines as recommended.”

Since late May, 3,907 cases of flu have been reported to the department overall with 701 of those confirmed specifically as swine or H1N1 flu by lab testing. “Our ongoing surveillance has shown that H1N1 continues to be the dominant strain of flu in Wyoming as it has been for months,” Murphy said. “Most of the flu cases that were not tested for H1N1 probably were in fact due to that strain.”

The department expects the number of actual flu infections around the state to be much higher, because most ill persons do not seek medical care or are not tested specifically for the H1N1 flu strain.

Influenza symptoms include fever, cough, sore throat, body aches, headaches and fatigue. Some patients also report diarrhea and vomiting. Actions recommended to slow the spread of illness include:

- When available, get immunized with both an H1N1 flu and a seasonal flu vaccine.
- In general, people who develop influenza-like illness should stay home from work, school or travel until at least 24 hours after they are free of fever. Those who are severely ill (such as having trouble breathing) should seek medical care.
- Avoid contact with ill persons.
- Covering noses and mouths with a tissue or sleeve when coughing or sneezing, and throwing used tissues in a trash can.

- Frequent hand washing with soap and water or the use of an alcohol-based hand gel.

More information about flu in Wyoming is available online at www.health.wyo.gov .

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